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ABSTRACT

Techniques and problems involved with the assessment of prior experiential learning are discussed and the assessment techniques of baccalaureate health administration programs are reviewed. Experiential learning is defined as learning that an individual has attained through experience prior to enrollment in an academic program. Broadening access to higher education for adults and creating educational environments that can accommodate students' individual differences are viewed as important benefits of offering credit for experiential learning. Various models for assessing experiential education are described including: faculty-based, student-based, credit by examination, product assessment, self-assessment, observation of student performance, simulations, interviews, and oral tests. Appropriate applications for each model are suggested. A survey of 37 baccalaureate programs in health administration investigating practices of granting credit for prior learning is also described. Enrollment figures, institutional characteristics, program size, year assessment of prior learning was initiated, credit policies and methods for assessment, number of credits granted, and limitations of the system are analyzed. Results of the survey indicate that institutions generally require students to undergo a rigorous evaluation process before credit for experiential learning is awarded. Multi-assessment measures are often employed and a limit may be placed on the number of possible credits awarded. It is suggested that improved and consistent evaluation methods are needed to deal effectively with prior learning. (SF)

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CREDITING OF PRIOR EXPERIENCE

(ALTERNATIVES FOR MEETING CREDIT REQUIREMENTS)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of experiential learning has both a broad and a specific meaning. In its broadest sense it can include any learning originating in any setting whether work, community or self-directed study and with or without an institutional sponsor.

More useful to this study is the definition supplied by Sexton and Ungerer (1975, p. 1), which describes experiential learning as the learning which an individual has attained through experience prior to enrollment in an academic program either through life activities generally or from some specific activity.

Assessment of prior learning is part of the social equity movement to broaden access to higher education for adults by individualizing programs of study and by creating adaptive educational environments which accommodate to students' individual differences. The ideal is that of an adaptive and individualized educational system which recognizes learning regardless of source (Trivett, 1975, pp. 4-8).

To qualify for award of academic credit and "if their educative results can be evaluated" experience whether from work of life sources should "fit into some significant comprehensive plan for learning" (Commission on Non-traditional Study, 1973, p. 129). Experience is not necessarily the same thing as learning (Willingham, p. 238). Nonetheless, educational institutions are expected to find ways to measure the outcomes of experience because of societal demand for credentials.

Experiential learning activities appropriate for this study include all types of out-of-classroom experiences that result in college-level learning. Validation of such learning is post facto and "rests on the decision of

validators that the learning is equivalent to academic classroom learning." (Trivett, p. 10)

Trivett (p. 49) regards the purpose of assessment of experiential learning as both individual and institutional. For the individual it is a method of facilitating personal development. For the institution it helps support program development and maintain quality.

II. INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS WITH ASSESSMENT

How does learning occur through experience? The process has been identified by Coleman (1976, pp. 50-52) as the reverse of that which occurs in a formal classroom setting. In experiential learning, action occurs and the learner sees the effects. In the next step, the learner must understand the particular situation so that if a repetition of a similar action occurs, a prediction of like outcomes can be made. Third, the learner must be able to derive a general principle from this and similar situations. Lastly, when he understands the general principle, the learner then applies it in a new circumstance that is within the range of the generalization. As pointed out by Coleman, experiential learning does not require the symbolic medium. However, the connection between the act and the consequence is of extreme importance because it affects the power of the learning - it is strong if they are closely connected, weak if there is a separation of time or space. "The weakest link appears to be... in generalizing from particular experiences to a general principle applicable in other circumstances" (p.58).

When this is contrasted with classroom learning in which the process is one in which a) information about a general principle or specific example is transmitted and received through a symbolic medium; b) the information is assimilated and the general principle understood; c) a specific application is inferred from the general principle; and d) the learner moves from the cognitive and symbol-processing sphere to the sphere of action, the difficulties faced by educational institutions in converting experiential learning into academic credit equivalents are readily apparent.

Information provided by CAEL (1974, pp. 24-28) in their document on Current Practices in the Assessment of Experiential Learning reveals a variety of reasons given by educational institutions for crediting of prior experiential

learning such as:

1. relevancy to adult life.
2. the importance and value of an individually created degree.
3. integration of learning with the life of the community.
4. access to college for those students unable to attend traditional programs.
5. serving as an experiment to eventually modify traditional education.
6. giving credit where credit is due.
7. integrating work and experience with an emphasis on enhanced employability.

The CAEL Project (pp. 30-31) identified several types of approaches for awarding credit for prior experiential learning. One which is quite common is the faculty-based model in which the faculty assume primary responsibility for working with the student in identifying potential creditable experience and in assessing the learning. Credit is granted either in blocks of credit, or course equivalents, or by relating the experiential learning to courses already in the catalogue.

Another is a student-based model in which the student has the responsibility for planning the learning, identifying its components and either assessing it or arranging for its assessment. Usually, students make the initial self-assessment of their experience and request a certain number of credits.

"Defining competencies [is] a necessary step to adequate assessment" (p. 33). The student model employs a competency approach because of the student's lack of familiarity with courses and credits. The competency approach may also be used in the faculty model. The CAEL study found that a variety of approaches were used by institutions in crediting prior learning. If an institution used a competency approach the student thought of his experiences in terms of competencies; if an institution used an outcome approach the experiences were more likely to be expressed as equivalencies to particular courses.

A critical problem in assessment is determining what competencies to assess.

Specification of competencies and measures of assessment are integrally interrelated. "A principal problem lies in the fact that many programs for crediting experiential learning are not based upon a clear conception of the particular competencies that have been or are to be achieved" (pp. 36-37).

Steps normally followed in the process of assessment of a student's prior learning are summarized (pp. 56-59) as:

1. the student acquires information on the availability of credit for prior learning and gives information on the experiences for which credit is sought, i.e., the types of learning or competencies must be identified.

2. the student receives more information on what has to be done to collect and document the learning, i.e., the learning or competency must be articulated to the student's educational goals or academic degree.

3. the student identifies learnings and competencies for which credit is sought and collects documentation, i.e., the learning experience must be documented.

4. a portfolio is assembled containing a request for credit, a description of the competencies acquired, and documentary evidence, i.e., the extent and character of the knowledge or skill acquired must be measured.

5. actual evaluation is carried out by the designated evaluator(s), i.e., the knowledge or skill must be evaluated for worth and for determination of the amount of credit.

Assessment of prior experiential learning is generally handled by faculty or specialized administrative staff. Either the student model or the faculty model is utilized. In actual practice a combination of the two models usually is employed with faculty determining the type of credit applied for and how the learning is to be documented and assessed.

III. ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

A number of examinations have been developed for evaluating off-campus learning. Other techniques include performance tests such as work samples and unobtrusive simulations, case study methods, in-basket exercises, interviews (single and panel), oral tests, self-assessment, and product assessment.

Credit by examination may attempt to measure a) the extent to which the examinee's knowledge resembles the knowledge acquired by a typical student at the end of a course, or b) broad areas of competence. This method is utilized in the granting of credit for individual courses to the awarding of a degree solely through examination. Credit may be awarded by an institution if it is consistent with their standards or it may be granted by an examiner accredited by an agency external to an institution.

One national examination program developed to facilitate the granting of credit for experiential learning is the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board. CLEP is based on the assumption that college level learning occurs outside the institution and can be measured and compared to that acquired by students in traditional classroom settings. The learning source may be formal study, private reading, employment experience, or industrial or business training along with a host of other sources (Trivett, p. 23). As a rule, CLEP is awarded general credit hours towards degrees rather than matched with specific course requirements. CLEP has been used by a wide variety of people including traditional college students.

Other examinations used to grant credit are The American College Testing Program (ACT), and The College Proficiency Examination Program (CPEP). The latter was established by the Regents of the University of the State of New York and has been taken by those who have "mastered course materials through

self-study, hospital service, correspondence study" and other modes of non-traditional learning (Trivett, p. 31). CPEP subject examinations measure factual knowledge and the ability to use the knowledge. The Regent's External Degree Examination Program (REDE) purports to measure broad areas of competence. These two examinations differ from CLEP in that credit is awarded not by individual educational institutions but by an examiner accredited by the Regents of the University of New York. CLEP is used towards the traditional faculty awarded degree while REDE and CPEP apply on administrative sanctioned degrees.

In the essay examination technique (Knapp and Sharon, 1975, pp. 29-30) the student organizes and writes an answer to a question or task. Because these kinds of questions do not call for right or wrong answers they are graded on different degrees of quality or merit. Essay examinations may be structured or unstructured, i.e., a candidate must answer a given topic under certain conditions or write on any relevant topic in a form or length of their choice. Essay questions should be constructed according to certain rules and conditions so that they are reliable, valid and fair. If the ability to be measured is the skill to communicate effectively the essay test is the most valid procedure.

If a written mode is used the preferred methods for evaluating out-of-classroom learning are an essay examination (either an assigned topic or a general essay) or a diary or a journal.

Product assessment (pp. 49-50) is the evaluation of a variety of products such as reports, diaries, portfolios, etc. to assess learning which cannot be observed. Each product is assumed to represent the skill of a student in a particular activity. Evaluation is generally conducted by one or more subject matter specialists. Evaluations by supervisors and peers are also sought.

Depending on the kind of experience being evaluated decisions must be made on the product to be evaluated and the method. Criteria should be established prior to the evaluation process. Establishment of guidelines enables a uniform assessment procedure. Limiting the products may result in loss of flexibility in product assessment in that atypical works of students may be eliminated. Often product assessment is supplemented by an interview.

Necessary conditions for appropriate use of product assessment are:

1. the product is more important than the performance.
2. the performance cannot be observed.
3. the product can be measured accurately and objectively.

In self-assessment (pp. 43-44) the student judges his own level of accomplishment. Broad areas of attitudes or values or specific knowledge or skills can be the focus. Self-assessment can be done at informal and formal levels. At the formal level the student might prepare a diary or a report on off-campus learning experiences and make an evaluation of these experiences. Alternatively the student may use a structured checklist, occupational history or self-assessment test. These latter instruments should be normed on persons competent in a specific subject area and the responses used to evaluate the applicant's responses. Additional research is needed to determine whether these instruments are appropriate in an educational setting. Informal assessment consists of discussions between the student and the faculty advisor about the accomplishment of pre-defined learning goals. Informal methods are flexible and individualized but they are subjective and non-uniform.

Observation of student performance (pp. 7-11) is another assessment technique. There are two major kinds of performance tests - the work sample and unobtrusive observation.

The work sample, which is not especially appropriate for this study, is a test that reproduces all or an important part of the actual operations or tasks

of a job. Detailed instructions on what is to be done and the basis for evaluating performance must be given to the examinee. Instructions and forms must also be developed for the evaluator. Both the process and the product are evaluated. Skills such as managing a business cannot be reduced to a test situation without extensive simulation. Work samples are more appropriate for vocational-technical subjects, foreign language proficiency, art, music and other skill proficiencies.

Unobstrusive observation of performance is desirable when the performance would be significantly affected by the student's awareness that he was being observed. In assessing the student's ability to perform under varying circumstances the assessor might observe the student in a natural setting or contrive a situation. In covertly watching a situation, the assessor must specify the critical elements of the behavior to be specified. Drawbacks to this method are the variability of the observer and ethical questions about the use of monitoring equipment such as tape recordings or television.

Observation may also take place through examination of relevant records and documents that indicate the worker's qualifications. Although a serious drawback is lack of comparability of performance between workers, these records, if evaluated appropriately, can accurately indicate past accomplishments.

Simulations (pp. 13-21) are used to measure more complex qualities than pure traits or skills, such as attitudes, motivations, personality, and social skills of leadership or decision-making ability. The nature and content of a task are explained to the candidate who is supposed to pretend that they are engaged in the task. The assessor can then observe and evaluate a performance in a lifelike setting. Paper and pencil simulations include case study techniques, individual fact-finding exercises, and diagnostic and troubleshooting

exercises. Non-paper-and-pencil simulations include in-basket tests, management games and leaderless group discussions. Complex skills such as analytical thinking, goal setting, interpersonal competence, decision making, communication and planning can be assessed by simulation exercises. Costs are high and affect personnel time, facilities and resources.

Leaderless Group Discussion (LGD) assesses the candidate's ability to work in a group situation. A group is given cases or problems usually dealing with supervisory or management problems. The participants function as consultants who resolve the problems and submit written recommendations. The role the person plays is presumably similar to that which they assume in a natural group. Research shows that LGD appears to assess a consistent personality aspect since its scores have high predictive validity.

Management games focus on skills relating to executive ability. Games can be programmed into machines or be played with other players. The usual development problems must be addressed in game design, i.e., time, types of functions, objectives, etc. There is no clear-cut relationship between gaming skill and job skills. Games are an economical technique because of the supply available but should not be used as the only measurement of problem solving or decision making ability.

Another type of simulation is interview simulation and/or role playing. The most common involves a simulated interview in which the student plays a role such as personnel manager. From a videotape, assessors judge, among others, ability to communicate, flexibility, and listening skills.

Written simulations such as diagnostic exercises are not often used in assessing management skills. One possibility that may be adapted from medical education consists of branched problems from which the examinee is required to make choices from a number of routes, more than one of which may lead to accept-

able results.

The case study method is a paper and pencil simulation in which the student writes an analysis of a problem with solutions and recommended actions all within a specified period of time. This type assesses the student's ability to analyze and solve complex problems.

The in-basket exercise is named for the in-tray common in business. The exercise requires the student to deal with problems as if they were actually on a job and provides a set of materials (memos, reports, letters, etc.) as the basic documents of the test situation. The student picks out their preferred action from a list of choices. Because behavior cannot be replicated in a second test situation and the fact that the student may not display typical behavior because of time and information constraints, these exercises are used more for training than assessment. Generally the in-basket can be used to assess problem solving ability, ability to organize information and ability to handle sensitive personnel situations.

Knapp (p. 37) defines the interview as "a face-to-face interpersonal role situation in which one person, the interviewer, asks the candidate questions designed to obtain answers which will lead to an evaluation of one or more learning outcomes from life experience and/or training."

Interview questions fall into three classifications:

1. closed questions calling for yes/no or agree/disagree answers.
2. open-ended questions which a student can answer free-style.
3. scale-items to which a student responds with a degree of agreement or disagreement.

Each of the above types of questions are appropriate under certain circumstances. Questions should be directly related to the attributes being assessed and show qualities of clarity, fairness and impartiality.

Reliability of the interview as an assessment instrument rests upon the

accuracy of the information provided by the interviewee, and on excluding or controlling interviewer bias. The interview is flexible and adaptable to individual situations. Its major disadvantage is that it takes much staff time.

Types of interviews are: structured - unstructured interviews, panel interviews, oral tests and the oral report or presentation.

Structured interviews are fixed in regard to the questions, their sequence and wording. Although responses are oral, the structured interview can be equated with a questionnaire and be administered in person or by tape.

In the unstructured interview the interviewer determines the content, sequence and wording of questions although the topics and issues are outlined. The unstructured interview may be combined with the use of scale items to obtain certain types of information.

In the panel interview technique several interviewers jointly interview a candidate. The panel members should be representative of different ages, educational backgrounds and interests. They should specify their roles in advance, the points to be emphasized and the questions to be asked.

Oral tests are most suitable for work experience calling for a high degree of expertise in dealing with subordinates, associates or the public. This is an in-depth technique which probes the candidate's qualifications relating to personality and experience on such dimensions as ability to express one's self fluently, appearance, poise, tact and judgment among others. In addition to the individual oral test there is a group oral test in which several candidates interact with each other and with an individual interviewer or interview panel. In some respects this type resembles a seminar or a leaderless group discussion.

IV. CURRENT PRACTICES IN EVALUATING PRIOR LEARNING BY BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS IN HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

A review of the literature found no data available on what practices are presently utilized in evaluating prior learning for credit in the health administration field. As part of their continuing study of components of educational programs appropriate for adult students, the Long Term Care Education Unit of the Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh initiated a review of current practices in the assessment of prior learning for credit of baccalaureate level health administration programs. Through the cooperation of the Office of Long Term Care, Association of University Programs in Health Administration and Dr. Sue Gordon, Boston University, sixty-two programs were identified and asked to provide this information.

A total of forty-three (69.4%) out of the sixty-two programs provided information. Of the forty-three, six (9.7%) indicated they could not provide any information because their programs were a) being phased out, or b) too recently started to respond, and thus have been eliminated from this report. Information provided by the remaining thirty-seven has been analyzed to determine practices of baccalaureate health administration programs in granting credit for prior learning resulting from personal experience and self-directed study rather than that gained under institutional sponsorship.

A. Characteristics of Programs

Of the programs indicating their affiliations, twenty-five (67.6%) were located in public institutions and ten (27.0%) were in private institutions. Twenty-four programs (64.9%) were based in universities and twelve (32.4%) were in colleges.

Thirty-five of the thirty-seven programs described themselves as traditional

programs.[1] One felt his program combined both traditional and external approaches while another described his institution as non-graded and competency based.

Thirty-five (94.6%) of the programs enrolled full-time students. The majority of these (71.4%) has less than forty-one students. Twenty-four of the programs (64.9%) also had part-time students. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

ENROLLMENT OF FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STUDENTS
BY NUMBER OF PROGRAMS
N=35[2]

Number of Full-Time Students	Number of Programs With Full-Time Enrollments	Number of Programs With Part-Time Enrollments[3]
1- 20	16	15
21- 40	9	2
41- 60	3	2
61- 80	1	1
81-100	2	
101-120	2	1
121-140	1	1
Over 140	1	2

From the data it appears that slightly less than one-third of the programs do not enroll part-time students. Information on the ratio of full-time to part-time students was not collected.

Fifteen of the thirty-seven programs assess prior learning and twenty-one have no provisions for doing so although three are currently considering assessment. What are characteristics of the assessing programs? Enrollments range

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[1] A traditional program is one which enrolls primarily full-time students who take a prescribed program of studies and who attend formal on-campus classes.

[2] Two programs did not provide data.

[3] A program's primary classification is by full-time enrollments. Since FTE's could not be computed, programs reporting part-time enrollments were recorded under their full-time enrollment classification.

from 13 to 467. Ten (67%) are based in public universities, 3 (20%) in private colleges and 2 (13%) in private universities. Except for three programs which enrolled only full-time students, all the rest of the programs enrolled both full-time and part-time students. In comparison, enrollment in the 19 programs not assessing prior learning ranged from 8 to 238. Twelve were based in public universities, 7 in private colleges and 3 in public colleges. Figure 2 provides an analyses of the size of the programs assessing prior learning.

FIGURE 2

ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING BY PROGRAMS
N=15

Size of Enrollment	Number of Programs	Percentage
1- 20	3	20
21- 40	4	27
41- 60	2	12
61- 80		
81-100		
101-120	1	7
121-140		
Over 140	4	27
No Detail	1	7

Enrollments were a mix of experienced and inexperienced students or students with varying years of experience. Three programs enrolled full-time students only.

B. ASSESSMENT PRACTICES OF PROGRAMS

1969 was the earliest year any responding program initiated assessment of prior learning. Figure 3 shows the range of years.

FIGURE 3

YEAR ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING WAS INITIATED
N=15

Year	Number of Programs
1969	2
1971	2
1972	3
1973	2
1974	1
1975	1
1976	2
1977	1
No date	1

Program directors were asked if they had program policies covering the awarding of credit for prior learning. With the exception of one, all of the programs engaging in assessment had some policies and nineteen of the twenty-two programs which did not assess experiential learning also had policies. Figure 4 gives the details of the responses.

FIGURE 4

NUMBER OF PROGRAMS REPORTING EXISTING POLICIES FOR AWARDING OF CREDIT FOR NON-SPONSORED LEARNING
N=33

Items	Program Policies Allow or Provide
Policy to determine if credit should be awarded	17
Policy to grant advanced placement within program	16
Policy to exempt students from field experience	17
Policy to diagnose students' knowledge and skills for guidance and counseling purposes	25

Eleven programs had one policy, ten had two, seven had three, five had all four policies and four had none of them.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether selected techniques for granting credit for previous learning were utilized by their programs. In addition to programs which are assessing prior learning, programs which do not assess such learning reported the existence of assessment methodologies also. Some of this

latter group noted that the techniques were used to evaluate the field experience requirements, i.e., sponsored learning. For those not reporting assessment practices an assumption may be made that policies exist and techniques identified in the event that assessment will be implemented. All responses are therefore reported in Figure 5 to provide the broadest information about how programs are handling (or plan to) the assessment of experiential learning.

FIGURE 5

USE OF SELECTED METHODS FOR ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING

N=37

Items	No. of Programs Using	No. of Programs Not Using	Rank by Usage
1. Standardized Examinations	8	29	4
2. Institutional or Faculty Developed Examination	14	23	1
3. Product Assessment	2	35	8
4. Documentation and Assessment of Experience by Third Party	10	27	3
5. Written Self-Assessment	6	31	5.5
6. Observation of Student Performance	3	34	7
7. Oral Presentation	6	31	5.5
8. Interview with Faculty	12	25	2
9. Other		37	

Programs assessing non-sponsored prior learning used the following techniques in order of most to least frequently: institutional or faculty developed examination (8); documentation and assessment of experience by third party (7); interview with faculty (7); standardized examination (5); oral presentation (5); self-assessment (3); observation of student performance (3); product assessment (1). Thus it appears that these programs differ from those not assessing prior learning in their use of the foregoing techniques. The most used method was the institutional or faculty developed examination while the least used was product assessment. Overall, more programs did not use these methodologies than used them. Except for three programs, multiple assessment

methodologies were utilized.

Of those using standardized tests, five used CLEP examinations, one used the American College Test, and one used the Allied Health Admissions Test. Written self-assessments were used basically to waive the field experience requirement.

Within programs, age did not appear to be a factor affecting application for credit by students. Those making application ranged from under twenty-one years to over forty years. Figure 6 presents an analysis of the responding programs' experience with the number of students applying and receiving credit for non-sponsored learning for a period of two terms, the average number of credits awarded per individual applicant, and program restrictions on the number of credits a student may be awarded.

FIGURE 6

PROGRAM PRACTICES IN AWARDING OF CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING
N=15

Program No.	Size*	No. of Student Applicants	No. of Students Granted Credit	Average Credits Granted	Restrictions
1	18	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	12 credits
2	20	11-15	No Date	No Data	No Data
3	25	6-10	1- 5	7-12	30 Sem. Hours
4	28	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	CLEP
5	35	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	16 Sem. Hours
6	40	1- 5	1- 5	1- 6	None
7	43	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	None
8	55	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	30 Sem. Hours
9	102	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	None
10	245	1- 5	1- 5	1- 6	60 Crs-Field Experience
11	250	1- 5	1- 5	1- 6	None
12	295	> 20	> 20	> 12	50
13	467	1- 5	1- 5	7-12	30 Hours
14	13	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
15	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data

* Includes f.t. and p.t. students

Nine of the fifteen programs did not charge students for assessment. One program charged a per credit fee and fifteen charged a flat fee.

Seven programs reported that students awarded credit for non-sponsored prior learning had no difficuly in their subsequent course work. Six programs exempted students from both required and elective courses whereas five exempted them from electives only.

Assessing non-sponsored prior learning involves a number of special problems as indicated by the literature review. Not all of the 15 programs reporting assessment activities had conducted research on any of the problems identified on the survey instrument or those unique to their programs. Conversely, some of the programs not assessing prior learning reported undertaking research. Approximately forty-nine percent or a total of eighteen programs (ten of the assessing programs and eight of the non-assessing programs) conducted research. Approximately fifty-one percent or nineteen programs (five of the assessing programs and fourteen of the non-assessing programs) had not researched any problem associated with evaluation of experiential learning. Figure 7 shows research activities by program size in full-time enrollments.

FIGURE 7

RESEARCH ON ASSESSMENT PROBLEMS BY PROGRAM SIZE
N=37

Size	Research	No Research
1- 20	8	8
21- 40	6	3
41- 60		3
61- 80	1	
81-100	2	
101-120		2
121-140		1
140		1
No Detail	1	1

The importance of the topics researched differed between assessing and non-assessing programs. Programs which engaged in assessment researched topics in the order shown in Figure 8. Programs which did not assess prior learning researched the topics in the order shown in Figure 9.

FIGURE 8

RANKING OF TOPICS RESEARCHED BY PROGRAMS
ASSESSING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
N=15

Topic	Frequency	Rank
Helping students identify prior learning relevant to their educational goals	9	1
How to determine reasonable guidelines for equating prior experience to credit hours	8	2
How to document prior learning	7	3
How to assess quality of prior learning	5	4
What constitutes adequate documentation	4	5
Availability of assessment materials	3	7.3
Procedure for establishing standards	3	7.3
Procedure for selection and training of assessment personal	3	7.3
Availability of studies on validity of assessment of experiential learning	2	9

FIGURE 9

RANKING OF TOPICS RESEARCHED BY PROGRAMS
NOT ASSESSING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
N=22

Topic	Frequency	Rank
How to assess quality of prior learning	7	1
How to document prior learning	6	3.3
How to determine reasonable guidelines for equating prior experience to credit hours	6	3.3
What constitutes adequate documentation	6	3.3
Helping students identify prior learning relevant to their educational goals	5	5.5
Procedure for establishing standards	5	5.5
Availability of assessment material	4	7
Availability of studies on validity of assessment of experiential learning	3	8
Cost of different assessment procedures	2	9.5
Procedures for selecting and training of assessors	2	9.5

None of the programs assessing prior learning reported carrying out formal evaluations of their techniques. Several expressed satisfaction with the

results as indicated by appropriate placement of students and the controls built into the assessment process.

V. CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent from this study that the approach taken by the majority of health administration programs to the granting of credit for experiential learning is quite conservative. The two major areas most frequently mentioned where experiential learning is acceptable in lieu of traditional learning are those subject areas to which the CLEP examinations apply, and the field experience requirement. Although students with experience are found within the great majority of the health administration programs which responded to the survey, over half of these programs are not offering opportunities for assessing non-sponsored experiential learning. Thus students who may already possess the knowledge and skills addressed in the curricula received no recognition through the award of credit or exemption from program requirements.

A philosophical issue of paramount importance which was not directly addressed in this study but which is implicit in the questions on the existence of policies, especially the awarding of academic credit for experiential learning, is the educational philosophy of the institution. There are two essentially competing approaches in an institution's concept of assessment of experiential learning for credit. The one is that the institution may wish to find alternate ways of meeting traditional requirements; the other is that they may wish to make a change in the competencies expected of the student, leading ultimately to a redefinition of the degree. The resolution of this program will become increasingly important as more of the more experienced adults return to higher education and apply for tangible recognition of their prior learning, particularly if it applies to an occupational or a professional field.

Admittedly there are a multitude of serious problems associated with the assessment and crediting of prior learning but in their efforts to offset challenges to the worth of the credits granted, institutions generally require

students to undergo a much more rigorous process than that required for most traditional learning. This study showed that multi-assessment measures were the rule rather than the exception and the number of credits awarded were limited when compared to the rigor of the process.

Methodological issues were fairly well researched by some of the programs in the survey population. Some programs did not indicate any research activities but this is not to say that individual faculty members may not have conducted their own research. However, since assessment is a program problem it is difficult to conceive how a program could reach a decision on such a controversial practice without even minimal formal research on practical, technical or educational problems. Some of the programs not engaging in assessment practices had undertaken research on problems of assessment but no conclusions can be drawn on the influence of the research on their non-participation in assessment.

Evaluation of assessment methodologies is another area suffering from lack of attention. This study showed that no program reported any means of determining the continuing reliability of their process of assessment. For those mechanisms relying on the judgment of an evaluator, consistency of judgment over time and between evaluators becomes a critical problem demanding vigilance in the application of good, current practices in measurement.

Experiential learning is not a fad in higher education that will run its course and disappear over time. It has especial relevancy for programs in occupational or professional education. Development of sound principles and practices, however arduous the task, will inevitably benefit the whole field of higher education by making it more adaptive in serving an increasingly diversified student body.

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